

End Medicare plan, which is completely accurate. But I'm going to give it another name today, Cut, Cap, and Continue Wars, because throughout the debate over the debt ceiling there's been an elephant in the room, if you'll pardon the expression, that hardly anyone is willing to acknowledge, and that is the impact of waging not one, not two, but three wars is having on our Nation's fiscal health.

Afghanistan alone is costing \$10 billion a month, with the total price tag for Iraq and Afghanistan, going back 10 years, \$3.2 trillion. And that's a conservative estimate, Mr. Speaker. These are staggering figures, especially during a recession when Americans are crying out for Washington to do something about creating jobs and breathing life back into our economy.

And what are the taxpayers getting for their trillions of dollars in war spending? More than 6,100 dead Americans, continued violence in Iraq and a Prime Minister who's cozying up to Iran, and an ongoing civil war in Libya, a corrupt regime in Kabul, insurgents that continue to kill at will, in Afghanistan a nation still under crushing poverty, and an Afghan Government that cannot protect its own people.

By any measure, these wars have been a devastating failure. And yet, with barely any scrutiny, barely any debate, and certainly no outrage from Republican leaders, we continue to write that check. Meanwhile, we have domestic programs that work, proven investments in the survival and prosperity of our people: Medicare, Social Security, Medicaid, school lunches, student loans, food stamps, unemployment insurance. But the majority says these programs have to be cut and capped so we can continue three wars.

Republicans want to cut programs that are keeping Americans alive while they want to continue funding the wars that have killed more than 6,100 Americans. It blows my mind, Mr. Speaker.

How about we ask the American people: Which do they prefer? These wars that have been failing us for 10 years or the guaranteed Medicare benefits that will allow them and their families to retire with dignity?

I ask my colleagues on the other side of the aisle: Do you really believe everything should be on the table? Everything? If you do, let's talk about war spending. And if you're really and truly serious about restoring fiscal sanity, where were you when the Congressional Progressive Caucus released a plan that will put us back in the black within 10 years?

The Congressional Progressive Caucus budget proves that we can balance the budget, but we don't have to amend the Constitution to do it. We don't need to shred the safety net to do it. We don't need to tear the heart out of Medicare to do it.

We can do it by bringing fairness back to the Tax Code, by ending subsidies, handouts, and giveaways to peo-

ple and corporations who will do just fine without them, we can do it by passing a clean debt ceiling and putting our people to work, and, Mr. Speaker, we can do it by ending these wars once and for all and bringing our troops home where they belong.

COLOMBIAN INDEPENDENCE DAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CANSECO) for 5 minutes.

Mr. CANSECO. Mr. Speaker, there are many concerns on the minds of Americans today. But there's one concern that dominates discussion in every coffee shop, grocery store, barber shop, civic clubs or everywhere else that Americans gather, and that is the need to turn our economy around and create jobs.

The American people are right to be concerned about the economy and jobs. We've had 29 straight months with the unemployment rate at 8 percent or higher, the longest streak since the Great Depression. Fourteen million Americans are unemployed, and month after month the jobs reports show anemic job growth.

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Over 2 years ago, the American people were told by President Obama and other Washington liberals that if we would just spend over \$1 trillion on the so-called "stimulus" bill, the unemployment rate would not exceed 8 percent. Well, in the entire Obama presidency there has only been one month—January of 2009—that the unemployment rate did not exceed 8 percent. Every month since the stimulus bill was signed into law in February of 2009 has seen unemployment rates at 8 percent or higher.

It is clear that the approach of attempting to spend and borrow our way to a better economy has not worked. That's why Congress needs to look to policies that will create jobs, like passing the three pending free trade agreements our Nation has with Colombia, Panama and South Korea.

Beyond the fact that the Business Roundtable estimates these agreements will create more than 250,000 jobs and are important for our economy, these agreements are also important to the United States' role in the world. There is no better illustration of this than the agreement we have pending with Colombia. Colombia is an important ally in Latin America, and I do say that today Colombians celebrate Colombian Independence Day. They're serving as an example for other nations and in stark contrast to the dictatorial regimes in Venezuela, Cuba and Bolivia. Colombia should not only enjoy a strategic relationship with the United States, we should also enjoy a strong commercial relationship. Passage of the free trade agreement would build upon the existing relationship and further strengthen it.

Apart from being beneficial for an important ally, this agreement is im-

portant for the U.S. economy. Here are just a few of the benefits that will occur with passage of the Colombia Free Trade Agreement: Duty-free access to the Colombian market for more than 80 percent of U.S. consumer and industrial goods, exports, with remaining tariffs phased out in 10 years; immediate duty-free access to more than two-thirds of current U.S. agricultural exports with the remaining tariffs phased out over time; strengthened intellectual property and investor protections; open services markets; and enhanced transparency in government procurement. However, perhaps the most important reason to pass this agreement is that if we don't, our competitors will.

Our competitors worldwide are aggressively moving to pass trade agreements. We have already seen our market share in Colombia jeopardized. For instance, although Colombia has doubled its agricultural imports over the past 5 years, the U.S. has seen its market share shrink by one-half. In 2008, American farmers held a 46 percent share of the Colombian market. Today, that share has diminished to 21 percent. In 2000, China was Colombia's 12th largest trading partner. Today, China is the second biggest trade partner for Colombia behind the United States.

Failure to pass the free trade agreement will allow our competitors to enjoy an artificial advantage. At this point in our economy, why do we not want to do everything we can to keep the jobs we have and create new ones? We need to put the politics aside and recognize the importance of the Colombia Free Trade Agreement, not only for our economy but for our strategic interests. It's time to pass the Colombia Free Trade Agreement.

GANG OF SIX AND CHAINED CPI

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) for 5 minutes.

Mr. DEFAZIO. Well, yesterday the so-called "Gang of Six" on the Senate side—six very important Senators—unveiled sort of an outline about how to save \$4 trillion over the next 10 years. Immediately it was embraced by President Obama. We really don't know much about it, nor does he, but he immediately embraced it.

We know one thing about it. It contains something called a chained CPI. Okay. Well, who cares about a chained CPI? Well, seniors, they care a lot about a chained CPI; middle-income taxpayers, they care about it—they don't know it yet; veterans, and a whole host of other people.

What is a chained CPI? Well, the pointy heads, like Mr. Furman who work for President Obama, say we're understating and overstating inflation with the way we adjust. There is something called substitution effect. So when prices of things go up, you buy something cheaper, so that means